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NAVAL TRADITION-- A RUSSIAN HERITAGE

For 250 years Russia has been seeking to gain identity as a viable naval force among the maritime powers of the world. Until recently this goal remained elusive, but under Soviet leadership the Kremlin appears determined to develop a naval capability that will ensure it a major share of the world maritime action.

A research paper prepared by

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England, the United States, France, Holland, Norway, and Italy are among the countries which have achieved a certain prominence on the sea at one time or another in their historical development. Each of these countries proudly recalls a naval history which bespeaks the significant success of their mariners in peace and war. Each has depended upon the sea for trade and for exterior communications. All have used the sea as a means of projecting their influence throughout the world and in challenging other countries for supremacy in international affairs. All are appropriately described as having been leading seapowers. On the other hand, Russia has always been characterized as a landpower because of its short, widely separated seacoasts, its vast expanses of territory, and its long land frontiers. This preoccupation with Russia's land-oriented power has overshadowed a strong-if spotty--naval tradition. She has a rather extensive naval history, and

it is not devoid of success. It is noteworthy that the Russians have engaged the Turks in no less than 12 wars or armed conflicts of equal magnitude since 1676.

The history of Russia as an organized society can be dated from the founding of the settlement of Kiev on the Dnieper River about A.D. 882. Kiev was founded by the Varangians who are associated in history with the Vikings. The ensuing years witnessed a large influx of Scandinavians who brought with them a deep knowledge of the sea and water transport. It was only natural that the chief Russian trade centers should be founded on the efficient water system they developed, using as its backbone the broad, quiet rivers. Indeed, the Viking portages between navigable rivers are now the canals of Russia's inland waterways.¹

The north-south river system was an important factor in the development of early Russia, serving both as a commer-

cial and as a military highway. Over this "River Road," as it became known, the Russians had access to the Baltic Sea in the north and to the Black Sea in the south. Both are closed seas, however, separated from the open oceans by narrow bottlenecks. In each case, control of the bottlenecks by an unfriendly power can block Russian access to the trade routes of the world; and this has, in fact, been true more often than not. Four times in less than 200 years (865-1043), the early Russians launched expeditions against the Greeks (the Eastern Roman Empire or the residue thereof) at Constantinople via the river system. None of these attacks were successful in dislodging the Greeks who defeated them with superior technology, mostly "Greek fire."² During the next 600 years the Russian state was to witness the disastrous Mongol invasion and the rise of Muscovy, but little in the way of naval growth.

Peter the Great (1682-1725) is generally considered to be the founder of the Russian Navy. Although it appears that Peter had a personal interest in the sea, it was his expansionist policy which focused his attention upon the development of naval power. At this time Russia faced a hostile Sweden in the north. In the south an equally unfriendly Turkey sought to limit Russian expansion in the Black Sea. Very early in his reign as Tsar, Peter was convinced that a confrontation with Sweden and Turkey would require that Russia possess a strong navy.³

By 1696 Russia and Turkey were at war over their Black Sea policies. In besieging the Turkish fortress at Azov on the north coast of the Black Sea, Peter made use of his naval forces to sever the sea lines of supply and thus caused capitulation of the Turkish garrison. This success served to confirm Peter's interest in seapower.

The Russian Navy under Peter won its first important sea battle at Gangut

in 1714 against the Swedish Navy. Because the battle was fought in shallow water, neither side could use its ships of the line, and the action was confined to galley warfare. The Russians enjoyed an overwhelming numerical superiority of 10 to 1, and this proved totally decisive. As a result, numbers became important in Peter's naval doctrine. They were frequently used as a substitute for quality, a conditioning factor in Russian thinking for over 100 years. Peter's orders, for example, required his commanders to assure a numerical superiority of at least 4 to 3 before assuming the offensive.⁵

The formation of the Russian Navy by Peter was a truly remarkable achievement. The obstacles which had to be overcome in order to attain even a minimum level of success were formidable. The Russian populace shared neither Peter's understanding nor his desire for seapower. Few of his advisers appreciated the potential advantages which a navy offered. Fortunately for Russia, the autocratic regime of the Tsar was strong enough to enforce its will; and Peter vigorously pursued his naval projects.

At that time there was little native Russian expertise in ship construction or operation. There was no seafaring population with the skill--nor were there the shipyards--to build and operate the type of navy which Peter desired. In consequence, he turned to foreign countries of long maritime standing for aid.

Peter took a personal interest in naval affairs. He even traveled abroad incognito as well as in his official capacity (proud of his physical strength, he is reputed to have worked as a common shipwright in various foreign shipyards), to study shipbuilding methods in England and Holland. He acquired ships in several ways. Some were purchased outright from foreign countries; some were built in foreign shipyards; other were built in Russia

under supervision of foreign shipwrights. Peter's objective was to develop a Russian shipbuilding industry, and ultimately some of his ships were almost entirely products of the Russians themselves.⁶

Manning the fleet was as formidable a task as physically constructing it. Experienced officers and men were needed, and there were few of these in Russia. An extensive recruitment of foreign officers was required to produce the necessary command structure. Command of Russian ships by foreign officers became so common that by 1713 only two of the 11 ships in the Baltic Fleet were captained by Russians.⁷

Although forced by necessity to employ large numbers of foreigners to man his ships, Peter quickly realized that only by educating Russians themselves to become proficient seamen could a powerful and permanent navy be built. Because of the imperial policy of "service to the State," there were ample, though unskilled, manpower resources. A cadre of officers was formed from the landowning class; but unfortunately they found military service in general, and naval service in particular, distasteful. This attitude did nothing to strengthen an already weak indigenous aptitude for the sea. In order to provide for future leadership requirements, in 1712 Peter ordered two-thirds of the sons of landowners to seamanship and nautical training either at home or abroad.⁸

In 1725, approximately 30 years after Peter began construction of his navy, it consisted of 35 ships of the line, 10 frigates, and numerous smaller vessels. Twenty-eight thousand men were assigned. Formal nautical education was provided by several institutions, including a naval academy founded in 1715.⁹ Although the Russian Navy was far from the foremost navy in the world at that time, this does show an interest and rate of growth which was superior, for example, to the nascent U.S. Navy.

As a comparison, in 1807, about 30 years after Independence, the active oceangoing U.S. Navy consisted of two frigates and four smaller cruising vessels. This Navy, unlike Peter's was constrained by limited funds and existed in a politically hostile environment.¹⁰

Upon the death of Peter in 1725, however, the Russian Navy entered one of its periods of decline. From 1725 until the accession of Catherine as Empress (1762-1796), it experienced sporadic activity, but achieved nothing of significance. Catherine the Great gave more attention than her immediate predecessors to improving the condition of the navy, and by 1770 it was again enjoying a period of prestige. Inactivity was replaced by an increase in the tempo of operations, and a new concept of employing it as an instrument of foreign policy was developed.

It may well be that Catherine understood the political use of seapower better than Peter. Despite a confrontation with the Swedes in the north, her main policy was oriented southward and into the Mediterranean Sea. Realizing the importance of the Mediterranean to world commerce and Russia's need to participate therein, Catherine made several attempts to secure bases in the Mediterranean. At one time she even considered offering aid to England against the American colonies in exchange for Minorca! Late in her reign she tried to establish a Russian claim to Malta, but the British forestalled this in 1800, after her death, by seizing Malta for themselves.¹¹

If Catherine understood what a navy meant to Russia, she was equally well aware of what a navy meant to Great Britain. Vexed by British disregard for the rights of neutral trade, Catherine joined with a number of other European nations to form the "Armed Neutrality" in 1780. This challenge to English seapower consisted of a covenant of several mercantile nations by which all participants pledged mutual cooperation,

including force, to protect their merchant shipping against all interference. The members of the Armed Neutrality supported the principle that neutral shipping would not be restricted in trading with belligerents except in the case of contraband, which was limited to arms and ammunition. They also espoused the doctrine that blockades were "legal only if effective." This meant that blockading ships had to operate physically close to the port in question. They could not seize a blockade-runner later on the high seas on the grounds that he had at one time violated the blockade. Upholding these principles of freedom of the seas was extremely important, because Russia depended heavily upon neutral shipping for commerce.¹²

Until the reign of Catherine the Great, Russian Fleet operations had been primarily limited to the Baltic and Black Sea areas. Although Russian control of these waters was by no means secure, Catherine dispatched a fleet of 15 ships from the Baltic to the Mediterranean in 1769 as a result of the outbreak of a Russo-Turkish War and the attendant closing of the Dardanelles. Eight more followed a few months later. This operation had the full support of the British who provided facilities along the route. Some of the ships also had British commanders. Even so, there were many mishaps; and it took several months for the Russian Fleet to assemble. This transfer of ships from the Baltic to the Mediterranean is one of the first examples of the Russians becoming "home water" sailors.¹³

In July 1770, Catherine's Mediterranean Squadron won a spectacular victory over a Turkish Fleet at Chesme Bay on the southwestern coast of Turkey. Although outnumbered 2 to 1, the Russians attacked the Turks with fury and practically annihilated them. Several British officers participated on the Russian side, but the Russians have always maintained that it was their

fighting ability and unprecedented spirit which contributed so markedly to winning the battle. The Tsarist Navy considered this to be one of the most important events in its naval history, and several ships were later to bear the name "Chesme" in commemoration.¹⁴

Like Peter, Catherine also employed a number of foreign officers in her navy. The employment of British officers was so extensive, in fact, that Catherine would have been hard pressed had the Armed Neutrality come against determined opposition from England.¹⁵ American naval historians are interested in this period of Russian naval history because one of the foreign officers who served Catherine during this period was our own Revolutionary War naval hero, sometimes called the "Father of the American Navy," John Paul Jones. He was given the rank of rear admiral by Catherine and commanded a portion of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the Liman Campaign against the Turks.

An able commander who aggressively pressed the enemy, Jones was, nevertheless, hampered by ambitious and incompetent courtiers, both in the fleet and in the Russian court. When he had accepted his commission in the Russian service, it had been with the understanding that he would exercise sole command of the Black Sea Fleet. This was not to be the case. Politics interfered, and he had to share command with others, particularly the unprincipled Prince Nassau-Siegen. The result--inevitably--was continual friction between Jones and Nassau. Jones commanded well and won several engagements, but he never felt that he or his officers received the credit which was their due. This was undoubtedly true. Eventually removed from his command, he left Russia following trumped-up charges of moral misconduct.¹⁶

John Paul Jones had a firsthand opportunity to study the Russian Navy. Some of his writings show a keen insight into the problems facing it and the

necessary measures to solve them. For example, Jones commented that the way for Russia to obtain good seamen was "... to create a merchant trade, to form an alliance with the United States, and have a squadron of evolution in the Black Sea directed by an admiral and properly instructed staff."¹⁷ He also had some observations on the Black Sea and the undesirability of Turkish control of Constantinople:

The commerce of the Black Sea is an object of great importance; but this commerce, so advantageous to Russia, will always be annoyed and often interrupted by the Turks, till Russia has a stronger fleet in the Black Sea to hold a rod over them, and to place the keys of Constantinople in the hands of the empress.¹⁸

Jones was very impressed with the capability and courage of the Russian officers and men whom he commanded. In July 1788, after the attack on Ochakov, he wrote to Prince *Potëmkin*, the overall commander, that "... I noted with great pleasure the unshaken and deliberate courage of the Officers of the Flotilla who seemed each to be his own General, and I have never seen greater Bravery than the Crews displayed."¹⁹

During the reign of Catherine, the Russians were frequently engaged in wars with Sweden as well as with Turkey. A number of naval encounters resulted, with the opposing forces sometimes equally matched and sometimes not. On several occasions the Russians, contrary to the doctrine they had inherited from Peter, fought when the weight of numbers was not on their side. At the battle of Hogland, the Russians met a slightly superior Swedish fleet. Only one ship was lost by each side, but the Russians prevented the enemy from attacking St. Petersburg, their objective.²⁰ About a year later a Swedish force of 21 ships fought 20 Russian ships near Oland Island. Neither side won a decisive victory, but it was the last time such an opportunity would fall to Sweden.²¹

By the end of her reign (1796), Catherine had the third most powerful navy in the world. Her immediate successors, though less inclined to promote the navy than she, did not neglect it. At the turn of the 19th century, they began to consider round-the-world cruises for other than simply military purposes. An earlier plan to send four warships on a cruise to the Pacific in 1786 as a show of strength was abandoned when war broke out with Sweden, but in 1801, Capt. I.F. Krusenstern, a noted Russian scientist and naval officer, began preparations for a circumnavigation of the world. Designed as a scientific and commercial as well as a military venture, this voyage is interesting from several aspects. Even after more than 100 years of naval experience, the Russians still relied heavily upon the British Navy. Furthermore, his two ships were purchased from England. Nevertheless, the inception and execution of the cruise were thoroughly Russian. This venture into the Pacific, lasting over 3 years, was highly successful and established a pattern for future exploration of this kind.²²

Russian ships also continued to operate in the Mediterranean during the early 1800's in furtherance of shifting Russian policy. The year 1827 found eight of them cooperating with 12 British and seven French ships in a combined squadron against Turkey in support of Greek independence. Their purpose was to enforce a truce which had been accepted by the Greek insurgents but which the Turks had shown reluctance to honor.

The allies operated near the enemy for several days before actually sailing into Navarino Bay where the Turko-Egyptian (Ottoman Empire) fleet lay at anchor. The entire battle is somewhat confused, but it appears that rash firing by one or two ships resulted in a wild melee. The opposing forces were about equal in the number of warships; but within 4 hours the Turks were de-

stroyed, suffering several thousand personnel casualties.²³

Damage to the Russians, English, and French was very light; no ships were lost and comparatively few men were killed or wounded. With the Turkish Fleet destroyed, a coordinated attack against Constantinople became possible; and the Russian admiral at Navarino strongly advocated such action. England, however, had no desire to diminish further Turkey's usefulness as a balance to Russian power in the Black Sea. When England refused to participate, the idea of a combined attack on the city was dropped.²⁴

Navarino Bay was the last battle fought completely by sailing ships. With the advent of the steam age in the navies of the world, Russia turned to the United States for assistance in the introduction of steam propulsion into her navy. During the 1830's, the Tsar sent a mission to the United States to study this subject. He also ordered a steam frigate from an American yard. This ship, the *Kamchatka*, was the largest steam frigate built in the United States up until this time.²⁵

A 10th Russo-Turkish War broke out in 1853 which eventually led to the Crimean War and intervention of the British and French Fleets in the Black Sea. On 30 November of that year, the Russians gave the world a demonstration in the use of naval ordnance which spelled the doom of wooden-hulled ships. The Turks had seven frigates and several smaller ships at anchor on their north coast in the Black Sea port of Sinope. Six Russian ships of the line under Admiral Nakimov attacked them, using explosive shells with devastating effect. Although this type of projectile had been used before by ships against land defenses, this was the first time in history that they had been used in a ship-to-ship encounter. In a short time the Turkish ships were destroyed. No quarter was given, and the Turks reportedly had over 3,000 casualties.²⁶

The Russians considered Sinope a great naval victory. It made Admiral Nakimov famous. In a letter a few days afterward to Prince Alexander Sergewitsch, Tsar Nicholas had this to say:

The victory of Sinope proves evidently that our Black Sea fleet has shown itself worthy of its destination. With hearty joy I request you to communicate to my brave seamen, that I thank them for the success of the Russian flag on behalf of the glory and honor of Russia. I perceive with satisfaction that Tehecmc has not been forgotten in the Russian navy and that the grandsons have proven themselves worthy of their grandsires.²⁷

Shortly after Sinope, a British and French squadron entered the Black Sea; and a few months later they were at war with Russia. Ostensibly the cause of the conflict was centered on the question of which church, the Roman Catholic or the Orthodox Catholic Church, would protect the Holy Places. In reality the war was fought to prevent the complete dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the control of the Dardanelles by Russia.

The sizable Russian squadron in the Black Sea did not attack the British and French naval forces which soon appeared. Contrary to the impassioned advice of his fleet commanders, including Nakimov, Prince Mentschikov, in overall Russian command, ordered the Russian Fleet scuttled in the entrance to Sevastopol Harbor and marched the sailors into the city's fortifications as augmentation for the garrison there.²⁸

Operations in the Baltic took a somewhat similar course with the British bombarding and blockading the ports and the Russian ships generally remaining out of action. Kronstadt, with its naval base, was one of the principal areas of such activity. The British had aspirations of attacking and taking this city, but it was realized that the defenses were much too strong. Although they were able to prevent the Russians

from sailing out, the British dared not sail in for an assault on the naval base. Interestingly enough, one element of the Russian fortifications were mines which had reputedly been laid in the approaches leading to Kronstadt. Both contact and command detonated types were used, and several hundred had supposedly been placed in the channel. Since the British did not try to go through the mined waters, there was no valid test of the effectiveness of these weapons at this time, but it is obvious that they were held in respect.²⁹

The Crimean War was a military defeat for Russia. England and France achieved their objective, which was to keep Russia from gaining free access to the open sea through the Dardanelles. The peace terms imposed by the Treaty of Paris in 1856 locked the gates of the straits even further. Not only was passage to the Mediterranean via the Dardanelles denied to Russian ships, but also severe restrictions were placed on any Russian military and naval forces in the Black Sea or along its coast.³⁰

The limitations imposed on the Russian Black Sea Fleet did not apply to the Baltic or to the Russian Navy as a whole. Consequently, they immediately began a program of strengthening and improving their navy in the unrestricted areas. Ironclads were introduced, and ship construction within Russia was emphasized. Their ironclad frigates *Sevastopol* and *Petropavlovsk*, for example, built in Russia, were sheathed with armorplate throughout their length and were considered first-class fighting ships. By 1863 the Russian Navy included a formidable force of ironclads, lightly armored steamers, and a large gunboat fleet.³¹

Frequently defeated in war and always handicapped by their environment, the Russians have never failed to rebuild their naval strength. They have learned by their mistakes and have particularly concentrated on developing types of naval warfare which are best

sued to their geographic position, available resources, and professional expertise.

Under "lessons learned," the Russians fully appreciated how easily their fleets could be bottled up in the Black or Baltic Seas by the stronger naval forces of England and France. Therefore, when relations with these countries became strained in 1863, the Russians dispatched two squadrons to neutral ports in the United States. In the event of war with England or France, these ships could then be sailed to operate against the naval forces and commerce of the enemy. There was considerable speculation that the visit of these warships to Union harbors was designed by the Russians to show support for the north in contrast to the open sympathy of England and France for the Confederacy, but the preponderance of informed opinion is that the Russians were primarily interested in preserving their ships in case of a war in Europe.³²

Naval operations during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 illustrated the capability of the Russians to develop and to utilize types of naval warfare which are best suited to their circumstances. When this war erupted, the Russians had not yet completely overcome the effects of the treaty of 1856 on their Black Sea naval forces. In contrast, the Turkish Fleet was strong and included several new ironclads.

The largest Russian units in the Black Sea were the two unusual circular ironclads *Admiral Popoff* and *Novgorod*. These ships, 121 feet and 101 feet, respectively, in diameter, were the product of an imaginative and unique design by Admiral Popoff of the Russian Navy. They drew about 13 feet, and their main armament consisted of two nontrainable heavy guns in a center barbettes. The entire ship rotated to bring them to bear. Six screws propelled these unique ships at a maximum speed

of about 6½ knots,³³ and they could, literally, turn in their own length.

The two "Popoffs" were ordered from Odessa to the mouth of the Danube to attack Turkish shipping, but both proved unseaworthy. Interestingly, this was not because of their peculiar circular design, but was due primarily to the ships' low freeboards and their inability to keep water off their decks. When underway it was necessary to close off ventilation, and the interiors of the two ships then became so overheated, as to be virtually uninhabitable. Consequently, the *Admiral Popoff* and the *Novgorod* were of little value as maneuvering men-of-war, but they did render useful service as moored, floating batteries in harbor defense.³⁴

Without capital ships, the Russians quickly adapted themselves to two types of naval warfare which produced for them results far out of proportion to the resources required: mining and torpedo attack. They had practiced mining as early as the Crimean War. The use of these weapons for the defense of Kronstadt has already been mentioned. The Russians now turned the mine against the Turks, planting both command detonated and contact types in the Danube by means of small, steam-driven "torpedo boats." This action effectively interdicted much Turkish shipping.³⁵

There were numerous Russian torpedo boat actions against Turkish ships, but none surpassed their spectacular attack on the river monitor *Seife*. The *Seife* was a powerful unit of the Turkish Navy, 115 feet long, manned by a crew of 120 men, and armed with two 80-pounder Armstrong guns. On the night of 25 May 1877, four Russian torpedo boats made a daring attack. Two spar torpedoes were exploded against the Turkish ship which sank.³⁶

The driving force behind Russian mine and torpedo operations in the Russo-Turkish War was Lt., later to become Adm. S.J. Makaroff. Makaroff

convinced the naval command to equip a steamer to carry four torpedo boats. The steamer acted as the mother ship, providing transportation to the area of operations and logistic support for the torpedo boats. Turkish ships were attacked at first with spar torpedoes and later with "automobile torpedoes." On the night of 25 January 1878, the Russians achieved the first tactical success in history with a Whitehead torpedo. The Turkish steam frigate *Intikbah*, 2,000 tons, was sunk by a torpedo fired at 80-yards range by a torpedo boat.³⁷

Why did the Russians choose torpedo warfare, and why were they so successful? Admiral Makaroff, himself, perhaps gives the answer to that question. About 20 years after the Russo-Turkish War, he published a work on naval tactics in which he wrote:

Torpedo attack closely resembles guerilla warfare, and therefore well suits the disposition of the Russian seaman. We may not possess the powers of systematization that characterize other western nations, but when war begins, the Russian knows that lack of organization may be replaced by personal initiative in the commanders. This is a quality which is priceless in a torpedo attack.³⁸

Despite a military victory over Turkey, when peace was formalized the Russians were still denied free access to the Mediterranean. The Treaty of Berlin of 1878 did nothing more than reaffirm the provisions of previous treaties. The Russians were allowed to build a Black Sea Fleet, but Turkey retained control of the straits. Once again, British opposition was foremost in restricting Russian free access to the open ocean.³⁹

After the war, Russia settled down in earnest to build a large and powerful navy, including battleships. In 1882 a 20-year ship acquisition plan was adopted which called for the addition of 15 battleships, 10 cruisers, and 11 gunboats to the fleet. This program was later increased to include 20 battleships

and 24 cruisers. Russian writings and official documents of this period evidence extreme concern about their naval strength which was vastly inferior to that of the British and the French. England, particularly, had a commanding lead in capital ships. The objective of the Tsarist naval construction program, as defined, was therefore two-fold. First, it would give Russia superiority over most of the lesser powers of the world. Second, the Russian Navy, in alliance with any other large navy, would be able to contest for command of the sea with the British and thereby establish a balance of power.⁴⁰

At this point the U.S. Secretary of the Navy ordered Naval Constructor Philip Hiehorn to tour Europe, examine all facets of ships and ship construction in foreign navies, and render a full report. Russia was one of the countries which Hiehorn was directed to visit. He submitted his report to the Secretary of the Navy in October 1885, and it showed that he was clearly impressed by the industry which the Russians exhibited in improving their naval posture. Hiehorn noted that they were seriously endeavoring to overcome old shortcomings in shipbuilding. They had determined, for example, to develop national sources of the required materials and, by directive, used Russian wood and steel exclusively in their shipyards. Hiehorn was of the opinion that the program which they had undertaken would "in a few years result in a formidable Russian Fleet."⁴¹

Unable to overcome the political and military obstacles which barred her from direct free access to warm water in the south, Russia turned to her far eastern frontier. In 1860 she had acquired Vladivostok, but this port was less than satisfactory for two main reasons. First, it was icebound for a significant portion of the year. Second, it was located in a disadvantageous strategic position, inside the Sea of Japan and subject to Japanese control

of access, much as were Russia's Black Sea and the Baltic Sea.

During the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, the Japanese had captured the Chinese naval base of Port Arthur. This base had the advantages Vladivostok lacked, and when peace was declared the Japanese desired to retain this ice-free port for themselves; but with thinly veiled threats, Germany, France, and Russia forced its return to China. A few years later, in 1898, Russia occupied Port Arthur as a naval base in support of her expanding influence in Manchuria and Korea. At this time she began building up her Pacific fleet to the profound consternation of the Japanese.⁴²

It soon became clear that Russian and Japanese interests in Asia were incompatible. Both countries had territorial and commercial designs on Manchuria and Korea, and the failure of diplomatic negotiations to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution made war inevitable. It was obvious from the outset that naval forces would play an important part in any armed conflict between these two powers, because command of the seas was necessary if Japan was to land and supply troops on the mainland. Russia had a tremendous numerical superiority in naval ships, but her advantage was largely negated by unfavorable geography. This prevented rapid concentration of Russian forces in the Asiatic area and, of course, resulted in poor logistic support for the ships that were there.

The Japanese struck the first blow of the Russo-Japanese War in February 1904 at Port Arthur. The Russians appear to have been somewhat less than totally alert, but they did station picket destroyers some distance outside the harbor for early warning of any impending attack. On 8 February 1904, Japanese destroyers approached the Russian units anchored at Port Arthur. Mistaken for the pickets, the Japanese were able to torpedo and damage two

battleships and a cruiser. This attack was conducted with almost reckless boldness; ironically, its successes were achieved with a weapon which the Russians had been the first successfully to adapt to naval use.⁴³

It is one of the surprises of this war that the Tsarist ships at Port Arthur were damaged with a weapon which Russia had first used successfully against the Turks in 1878. From the manner in which the attack was executed, it would seem that the Japanese had been unknown students of Makaroff. In his 1898 book on tactics, Makaroff had the following additional passage concerning the conduct of a night torpedo attack:

... we conclude that secrecy should be observed while we remain at a long range from the enemy to prevent their torpedo boats from interfering with us; but when the moment of attack approaches, superfluous concealment should be thrown aside, and we should approach boldly for 'God helps the brave.'⁴⁴

The initial successes by the Japanese may partially be attributed to ineptitude on the part of the Russian command in Asia, but this was soon to be rectified. The overcautious attitude of the Russians at Port Arthur which caused them to avoid battle with the Japanese was reversed in Port Arthur when Admiral Makaroff arrived. Makaroff was the same aggressive officer who had operated so successfully with mines and torpedoes against Turkey in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. In the short time which fate left to him, he made sweeping changes in the Port Arthur squadron's organization and training. Although he avoided a decisive engagement with the Japanese, which might have resulted in his defeat, he did sortie with his ships against smaller Japanese forces and lines of communications⁴⁵ and was planning larger scale operations.

The Japanese soon resorted to mining operations in an attempt to bottle their enemy up in Port Arthur. Their

most successful such operation took place in April 1904. It is conceivable that the Japanese had carefully planned what later transpired among the mines on 13 April, and possibly they planted this field with the express purpose of later luring the Russians through it. At any rate, when the Russian Fleet sortied to assist one of its cruisers under attack by a small Japanese force, Admiral Makaroff was aboard the battleship *Petropaulovsk*. The main enemy battle fleet appeared, the Russians reversed course to return to port, and the flagship struck a mine and sank. Hundreds of the crew were killed, including Makaroff. Some historians consider him the most serious loss of all. For the second time in the early months of this war, a weapon which the Russians characteristically used so effectively did them serious harm when employed by the enemy.⁴⁶

After the death of Makaroff, the war continued for some months without a decisive naval action. The Russian ships at Port Arthur made one futile attempt to reach Vladivostok, and the ships at Vladivostok tried unsuccessfully to rendezvous with them. The Port Arthur squadron, attacked by the Japanese battle fleet, retreated to the safety of its harbor, and the Vladivostok squadron was engaged at sea by a Japanese cruiser force which sank one ship and chased the remaining two back to their base.⁴⁷

A new phase in the naval activity of the war started in October 1904. A Second Pacific Squadron was formed from Baltic Fleet units. (Makaroff's Port Arthur squadron had been the "first.") This squadron sailed from Libau for Port Arthur under the command of Admiral Rozhdestvenski in what was to be an epoch-making cruise. The difficulties which the Russian commander faced are hard to imagine in today's environment of aircraft, fast ships, modern communications, and mobile logistics. The art of underway replenishment had not been developed,

and it was necessary to arrange for a staggering amount of logistics along the way at various foreign ports. Provisioning and coaling facilities had to be obtained. Maintenance on ships and equipment had to be done en route. Even before departure, the material condition of the force left much to be desired. Training, morale, and administration were all problems of great complexity which had to be solved by the Russians in order for them to successfully transfer their ships from the Baltic to the Pacific.

In April 1905 the Second Pacific Squadron arrived at Cam Ranh Bay in what is now Vietnam, completing an outstanding feat of seamanship, leadership, and management for the Russian Navy of this time. Although the squadron had been plagued by collisions, breakdowns, and the "Japanese jitters" which had culminated in their firing on English fishing craft in the English Channel under the impression that they must be Japanese torpedo boats, Rozhdestvenski had been able to safely bring the bulk of his force into the Pacific area of operations. By this time, however, Port Arthur had fallen to the Japanese.⁴⁸

The Second Pacific Squadron was composed of the best ships of the Baltic Fleet, and Rozhdestvenski had adamantly opposed all proposals which would have attached less capable and older units to his command. One member of his staff felt differently. Capt. Nikolai Klado, who had left the fleet during the voyage and returned to Russia, continued to advocate the formation of a Third Pacific Squadron from any ships available, whatever their age or condition. How Klado was able to prevail over the advice of the operational commander is uncertain, but prevail he did. A Third Pacific Squadron was dispatched to rendezvous with Admiral Rozhdestvenski, and he was directed to await its arrival.⁴⁹

Klado apparently wielded con-

siderable influence in strategic thought. Writing in December 1904, he was adamant about the requirement to reinforce the Russian naval forces in the Pacific. He not only considered formation of a Third Pacific Squadron mandatory, but he had some interesting comments in another area when he discussed another source of naval forces for use against the Japanese; the Black Sea Fleet. Klado wrote:

And how is it that the Black Sea Squadron has thus been condemned to inactivity? The reason is simply this: we have to lament an evil time in our past life when we were worsted in an unequal war and had to yield to the unreasonable demands of our victors. First of all, we had to bind ourselves never again to keep a fleet in the Black Sea, and when we were able to obtain some modification of these terms, we had to agree never to take our fleet out of the Black Sea without the special permission of the Sultan. But are we therefore, to stand defenceless before our enemies? Certainly not! I cannot now and never should be able to fall in with anything so utterly absurd. What! To respect such shameful treaties! They should be ruthlessly torn to shreds; that is my view, and I am certain it is also that held by thousands of my fellow-countrymen.⁵⁰

Regardless of how Captain Klado and thousands of his countrymen felt, the Russian Black Sea Fleet played no active part in the war. Once again geography proved a liability, and foreign control of the straits limited the operational usefulness of a substantial force.

Rozhdestvenski's arrival in the Pacific, his junction with the slow and obsolete Third Pacific Squadron, and the fall of Port Arthur set the stage for the final defeat of the Russian Navy by the Japanese. With Port Arthur now closed to him, the Russian admiral decided to try to slip through the enemy fleet and reach Vladivostok. Admiral Togo, with a strong force, opposed him. The Japanese were superior in every respect except in the number of battleships. A comparison of

the major units of the two sides is as follows:

	Russian	Japanese
Battleships	8	6
Armored Cruisers	3	8
Cruisers	5	15
Destroyers	9	21*

*(plus 45 torpedo boats)

The Japanese ships were more modern, better maintained, and had a speed advantage over the Russian ships. Their crews were highly trained and had just gained combat experience in the Sino-Japanese War.⁵¹ They were, moreover, operative on very short logistic lines.

The decisive naval battle of the Russo-Japanese War was fought on 27 May 1905 in the Straits of Tsushima. The Japanese showed their overwhelming superiority by completely destroying or capturing most of the Russian ships in the Pacific. A disastrous blow for the Russians in both men and material, Tsushima gave the Japanese unimpeded command of the sea and, of course, resulted in their victory in the war.

The Russo-Japanese War was a contest between two countries for command of the sea. Each side, to win, needed this command. The Russians had not fought a naval engagement involving capital ships since the Crimean War. Their geographic and logistic shortcomings have already been noted. They had focused too little attention on the navy's operational readiness. Even before the defeat at Tsushima, Klado wrote, "Owing to the weakness of our fleet and, above all, to our ignorance in naval matters, we are exposed to the risk of being finally defeated in this war and forced to accept a humiliating peace."⁵²

Rather than discouraging them, defeat served more than ever to confirm the conviction of Russian officers that a strong navy was an indispensable requirement for the future of Russia. One high ranking general advocated strong

fortifications at Vladivostok and the engagement of foreign shipyards in a program to rapidly build up a powerful navy.⁵³ Klado took almost exactly the same position. In this regard there is some similarity between Klado and Mahan. Both were instructors at higher naval institutions of learning, and both were strong proponents of seapower for their respective countries. Klado believed that the future of Russia in war depended upon a mighty navy.

The Russo-Japanese War ended in 1905, and by 1909 the Russians had embarked on a program to rebuild their navy. This plan, combined with one adopted in 1912, was intended to produce 12 battleships, plus a number of cruisers, destroyers, and lesser types. Russian destroyer design was superior to other contemporary destroyer efforts in both speed and in armament. Particular attention was paid to torpedo tubes for these ships. They also began construction of the first minelaying submarine *Krab*, which was to see action in the First World War. These plans illustrate a determination to become a first-rate naval power in spite of serious obstacles such as a lack of adequate shipbuilding capacity and unfavorable geography.⁵⁴

Russia's naval power had not, however, yet been rebuilt when the World War started in 1914. Consequently, she was not prepared to conduct large-scale offensive operations against the vastly superior German Fleet. Fortunately, Germany was engaged against an alliance that included England, the world's strongest seapower; and the existence of the British Navy prevented the Germans from concentrating on the weaker Russian naval forces.

In the Baltic Sea there were eight Russian battleships and other smaller units. The High Command decided to use these forces as a "fleet in being," a tactic which, though not decisive, had nevertheless enjoyed some success throughout naval history. Therefore, it

was concentrated in the Gulf of Finland for the protection of St. Petersburg.⁵⁵

The character of operations in the Black Sea was somewhat different. The Russians were more aggressive and displayed a greater degree of self-confidence. Their five Black Sea battleships obviously had less prospect of having to engage a larger and more powerful German force, and this allowed them more freedom and flexibility.

The Russians excelled in mine warfare during World War I. They had made effective use of this weapon in every conflict in which they had participated since 1854, and now the mine became one of their primary tools of warfare. Defensive minefields protected their ports. Offensively, the Russians mined the likely transit lanes of German shipping. The Germans lost a large number of ships because of this tactic, including cruisers, steamers, destroyers, and torpedo boats. Mines also were responsible for damaging the *Goben* and *Breslau*, the two most important German units in the Black Sea.⁵⁶

Russia did not remain in the war until the defeat of Germany, for the Bolshevik Revolution forced her withdrawal. The causes of the revolution had deep roots, and popular grievances had been accumulating for years. The Russian sailors, for the most part peasants, were in sympathy with the Bolsheviks and were staunch supporters of socialism. Civil war soon broke out between the Communists and the anti-Communist White Russians who were aided by the Allies. Both sides initially controlled some of the existing naval units. By the end of the war, however, there were few ships left in Russia. Some had been scuttled; some had been sunk by the opposing sides; and some had been turned over to the French for internment. For all practical purposes, the navy had ceased to be an effective force, having been reduced to three old battleships, five cruisers, and a few destroyers and submarines.⁵⁷

The final dissolution of the navy came in February 1921. Sailors at the Kronstadt naval base who had supported the Bolsheviks in 1917 now demanded more liberal freedom and actively opposed the regime. Lenin considered them to be a serious threat to Communist control and authorized ruthless suppression of the Kronstadt movement. This was done with great bloodshed. For some years thereafter, the navy would be viewed with suspicion and distrust by the Bolsheviks.⁵⁸

The importance of naval power in world affairs was vividly illustrated for the Russians during the Spanish Civil War. Soviet merchant ships carried supplies to the Spanish Communists and one of them, the *Komosomol*, was sunk by Franco's forces in December 1936. The Soviets protested loudly, but they had no naval units capable of enforcing their protest. As a result of this incident, the Soviet press renewed its call for the construction of a powerful navy.⁵⁹

Beset by internal and external economic and political problems, the Communists were unable to begin to rebuild the navy for several years. There was limited activity in this regard in the 1920's, but large-scale plans did not gain momentum until about 1934. Originally the new navy was oriented toward a purely defensive role, but heated controversy over this philosophy soon arose in both the political and military spheres. The opposite position, i.e., the need for an offensive capability, was espoused by a group of officers who won Stalin over to their side. During the purges of the 1930's, most of the opposition to big ship thinking was eliminated while its proponents received rapid promotion.⁶⁰

Realizing the military and commercial importance of a northern sea route to the Pacific, the Russians expended considerable effort in its development. The Northern Fleet had been established in mid-1933, but it was not until

1939 that the first Northern Fleet Soviet warships (five destroyers) transited to Vladivostok via the northern sea route.⁶¹

The decade 1930-1940 was extremely important for the Russian Navy. Government propaganda was designed to arouse public support for seapower, and Navy Day was established in 1939 as one means of educating the people on the role of the navy. Increased effort and resources were devoted to ship acquisition. Negotiations were opened in foreign countries for the purchase of ships of battleship size and for materials such as armorplate and heavy machinery. The Russians even formed a special company for this purpose in the United States. Plans were laid for the construction in the Soviet Union of 35,000-ton battleships mounting 16-inch guns. Once again it became apparent that the Russians were seriously intent on entering the world maritime arena,⁶² but, again, their uncompleted plans were interrupted—this time by World War II.

Russian naval operations during the war consisted mainly of mining, mine-sweeping, small-scale amphibious landings, and submarine attacks. Their heavy ships consistently avoided action against even inferior German forces. This simplified the German Navy's task of keeping them from breaking out of the Baltic. Soviet submarines presented a potential threat to Baltic shipping, but they were used ineffectively and did not achieve very much. Several were lost or damaged in minefields. In 1943 a net was laid across the Gulf of Finland that prevented Russian submarines from reaching the Baltic until after the capitulation of Finland. During 1942-43, the Germans operated in the Eastern Baltic with relative impunity, losing only six small warships. Even after the Soviets launched the 1944-45 offensive, their navy played only a minor role in this area.⁶³

This situation in the Black Sea was

somewhat different. The only Axis naval forces here when the war began were a few obsolete Rumanian ships. Consequently, the Russian Navy exercised command of the sea for several months. It engaged in shore bombardment, mine warfare, and in amphibious landings to support the army. It also was called upon to assist in the evacuation of Sevastopol in mid-1942 as the Germans advanced. By this time the Germans had succeeded in building up a small Black Sea naval force of their own. This consisted mainly of small craft and a few submarines with which they severely restricted Soviet supply traffic, sinking about 200,000,500 tons of shipping, with no loss of submarines to themselves. A similar Russian effort at destroying German lines of communication was much less rewarding, resulting in only 15 ship sinkings in 1942-44.⁶⁴

There are several reasons why the Russian Navy played only a minor role in World War II. First, they had no opponent on the sea. Although the Germans had a strong navy, it had been assigned to counter the British as a primary mission. Second, the Germans chose the historic overland invasion route. The invasion of Russia did not depend upon long sea lines of communication susceptible to attack by an enemy. Neither side needed a navy to win the war, but both needed powerful armies. Consequently, their resources were poured into land forces. Third, the Russians were extremely concerned with supplying the army and protecting its flanks, a task which they assigned to the navy with high priority. Finally, their chief naval opponent during the war cites one other reason why they were ineffective. Adm. Friedrich Ruge of the German Navy had this to say after the war about Russian naval operations:

Yet no German officer who fought the Russians in 1914-1917 had any real respect for their fleet. It is true that the ships knew enough how to fire

their guns, and in a tight corner, the crews would fight bravely to the end. But what they always lacked—in the Russo-Japanese War as well as in 1914-1917—was the ability to make quick decisions and to exploit the ever changing tactical and operational opportunities inherent to a war at sea.⁶⁵

Having paid a high price for victory over the Axis, Stalin sought to use Russia's contribution to their defeat as a lever in effecting political changes favorable to the Soviets. Therefore, at the Potsdam Conference in 1945, he pressed for a modification of the Montreux Convention governing the Dardanelles and proposed that the question be settled as follows:

1. The straits would be open to merchant ships of any country.
2. Unrestricted passage of the straits by all warships of any Black Sea power.
3. Passage of the straits by warships of non-Black Sea powers permitted only under special circumstances.
4. Recognition that control of the straits was under the sole cognizance of Russia and Turkey.
5. Joint organization by Russia and Turkey for defense of the straits.

The Western Powers refused to accept the last two points,⁶⁶ and the item remained unresolved.

The control of the Turkish Straits is, and has always been, a burning issue with the Russians. In his memoirs, President Truman discusses Stalin's expression of their long-standing position concerning the Dardanelles:

With regard to the Black Sea Straits, Stalin said Russia regarded the Montreux Convention as inimical. Under this treaty, he complained, Turkey had the right to block the Straits not only if Turkey were at war but if it seemed to Turkey that there was a threat of war. The result was, he continued, that a small state supported by Great Britain held a great state by the throat and gave it no outlet. He could imagine what commotion there would be in England if a similar regime existed in Gibraltar or in the Suez Canal, or what commotion there would be in the

United States if such a regime existed in regard to the Panama Canal.⁶⁷

The British and the French demonstrated how they would react to such a regime in the Suez Canal by invading it in 1956 after it had been closed by Egypt.

Stalin's attempt to revise the Montreux Convention and his reasons illustrate once again the long-standing sense of frustration felt by the Russians. They have never concealed their resentment toward the West. It is reasonable to assume that they will continue to seek means of opening the straits, including diplomatic and military pressure on Turkey, a country which is vital to Western efforts to restrain Russia's Black Sea naval forces from becoming a threat in the Mediterranean. Recently Turkey has reportedly violated the convention by allowing Soviet submarines to transit the straits before sunrise. Turkey has denied any violation. Repeated actions of this nature could become a "de facto" revision of the Montreux Convention.⁶⁸

A detailed discussion of the post-World War II Russian Navy is beyond the scope of this paper, but some of the salient features of its 1945-59 history can be summarized as follows:

At the conclusion of World War II, the proponents of Russian seapower retained considerable influence within the Soviet military structure, even though the navy had played only a minor role in defeating Germany. This is evidenced by a speech of Vice Admiral Abakin to a meeting of Soviet officers in July 1946. Abakin proclaimed that the Soviet Union as a great naval power had "state interest" on the seas and would take the necessary measures to defend them. He expressed the Soviet intention to continue building up a strong navy.⁶⁹

By 1945 the Russians had abandoned the concept of the battleship as their main fleet unit. They did, however,

complete a number of cruisers and placed them in service subsequent to the mid-1950's. They also began an extensive submarine construction program which ultimately was to provide them with the largest submarine force in the world.

It was clear that Russian leaders doubted the usefulness of large surface units when Premier Khrushchev in 1956 characterized the cruiser as suitable only for a means of transportation for diplomats. The submarine program, however, still maintained its momentum.⁷⁰ A large number of both conventional and nuclear-powered submarines were completed, and by July 1962 the Russians had successfully conducted their first underwater missile launch from one of them.⁷¹

The impact of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis on the role of the Russian Navy is uncertain, but it is likely to have been a lesson in the value of conventional forces. Cuba presented a situation in which the Soviets were unable to successfully engage in a limited, non-nuclear conflict at sea because they lacked the necessary capability. It is probably for this reason that they began to place renewed emphasis on the more conventional aspects of naval power.

During the past 5 years, the Russian Navy has greatly expanded its worldwide operations, particularly in the Mediterranean where the Arab-Israeli conflict has provided strong rationale and justification for its presence. The Soviets have openly declared that the fleet is operating in the Mediterranean area in direct furtherance of the interest of the U.S.S.R. They did, for example, increase the number of ships there from less than 10 in early 1967 to over 40 immediately after the Arab-Israeli war. Since then the number has varied in the range of 20 to 40. It is now obvious that they intend to compete with the U.S. 6th Fleet for influence among the countries of that region.⁷²

Soviet naval activity has not been

limited to the Mediterranean. Russian ships have been operating with increasing frequency in other areas of the world, including the Pacific and Indian Oceans. They have even sought regular refuel and repair facilities from India. Furthermore, they have demonstrated a quick response capability in the Sea of Japan. When the United States dispatched a task force into Korean waters after the seizure of *Pueblo*, the Russians immediately sent a significant counterforce of surface combatants—estimates range as high as 14 to 16 guided-missile frigates or “cruisers”—into the same area.⁷³

In his book *The Influence of Seapower Upon History, 1660-1783*, Adm. A.T. Mahan set forth six national characteristics which historically have exerted either a positive or a negative influence on a nation's development of seapower. These are geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, number of population, character of the people, and character of the government.⁷⁴

Russia's geographical position, physical conformity, and extent of territory have all impeded her development as a maritime power. In spite of long coastlines in some areas, there are few good harbors. As previously pointed out, access to any open ocean area, except from her far north and most inhospitable parts, is severely restricted. Thus far, only temporary solutions to these problems have been found. Four separate fleets are not an acceptable answer to the long divided coastlines, but development of the northern sea route has at least improved her lines of communication, albeit in only a small way. Elimination of the objectionable provisions concerning control of the Dardanelles has been only partially successful, and the Russians can be expected to continue efforts to gain unlimited passage through the straits.

The remaining three elements of seapower are more susceptible to change

by the Russians themselves. The population is large, but only a small percentage has in the past been engaged in maritime pursuits, and the character of the people has, heretofore, inclined them more away from than toward the sea. This is no longer so. The Soviets have taken the advice of John Paul Jones concerning the way to obtain good seamen. They have begun to build very large, modern, and efficient merchant and fishing fleets. Finally, the character of the government in Russia has been completely totalitarian in the Tsarist period as well as now. This fact has frequently enabled a seapower-minded minority to cause an entire nation to embark on a program of naval and maritime expansion.

Naval tradition is, indeed, a Russian heritage. For over 250 years their navy has been striving for its identity among the other navies of the world. It is a history of alternate frustration and achievement. The Russians have never

been quite able to develop their capabilities to the extent of other leading seapowers, but they have nevertheless kept their goal in mind. Although the urge to go down to the sea in ships has sometimes lain dormant, it has never disappeared and is now resurging more strongly than ever before.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Lt. Comdr. Wayne L. Chadick, U.S. Navy, is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy (Class of 1958) and did postgraduate work at Tulane University. He has had extensive experience in ship weapons systems, serving in this field on the U.S.S. *Canberra* (CAG-2), the U.S.S. *Semmes* (DDG-18), and more recently in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. Lieutenant Commander Chadick is currently a student at the Naval War College, School of Naval Command and Staff.

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Ours is a maritime nation, requiring the most powerful navies to protect our free rights to the farthest reaches of the seas.

*Lyndon B. Johnson: To the Navy League,
27 October 1964*